





Issue № 169: Heisenberg Uncertainties: Why Your Opinions Are Both Right and Wrong.

**Fowl Feathered Review** is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

*"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."*

*--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue*



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for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

# Submissions



## **Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):**

1. **Craft (or Culinary Construct):** 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In possession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, "China Wok Habitue," suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it's more likely a testament to the local takeout joint's generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

**Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.**

[Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers \(pw.org\)](http://FowlFeatheredReview.com)

A presunta

"Non ignora malí, míserís succurrere díscó."

— Virgíl, The Aeneíd

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a poster Lee  
~~R + 2810~~

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# The Hundred-Eyed City (Or, How Bacho Bachev Learned to Stop Worrying and Hate the Picture Show Slightly Less)

By Grozda Denica Dragova

**I. The Crank's Calculus** Every February 14th at 3:33 AM, as Sofia's frost-bit trams groaned into motion, Gospodin Boris "Bacho" Bachev awoke to the smell of celluloid decay. The annual Sofia International Film Festival had begun, and with it, the city metastasized. Overnight, cinemas sprouted like fungal blooms: Kino Kaskad in the shadow of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Zvezda Underground beneath the lion statues of the National Theater, Bansko Noir wedged between a Soviet-era pharmacy and a vape shop named Cloud and Communist. The digital sign at the city limits flickered: CINEMAS: 143.

Bacho, 83, leathery as a cured salami and twice as bitter, slid into his mustard-yellow Trabant. His driver, Plamen—a former nuclear physicist turned taxi poet—recited Tarkovsky haikus while Bacho muttered coordinates. "HAH!" he barked outside Kino Zumbul, its marquee advertising Dogtooth dubbed in Bulgarian. "HAH!" at Cinema Sirene, where teenagers queued for a Pasolini-Barbie double feature. One hundred and forty-three times, his guttural refusal echoed—a ritual as sacred as the Orthodoxy.

"You're a folk hero," hissed Zdravko, a barista-projectionist at Kafka's Kino, serving espresso shots through the projector's film gate. "A symbol!" "Symbol of what?" Bacho spat. "Of... resistance? To the... cinematic-industrial complex?" Bacho lobbed a dried apricot at Zdravko's beret. "I hate apricots too."

**II. The Projectionist Economy** By law, every third Sofian was now a projectionist. Schoolteachers moonlighted splicing 35mm reels. Grandmas traded banitsa for Hitchcockian plot twists. In Studentski Grad, children—Kiro and Nadezhda—projected Paddington 2 onto snowbanks, charging 5 leva for “immersive marmalade experiences.” Hipsters like Ivaylo and Mariana resurrected rusted projectors from junkyards, trading them to landlords for rent. (“This Arriflex 35mm is vintage! Worth three months in Lozenets!”)

The city thrived on celluloid cirrhosis. Pharmacies sold “Bergman’s Melancholia” melatonin gummies. Street cleaners wore Fellini-esque bowler hats. Even stray dogs howled in iambic pentameter.

**III. The Girl Who Loved Ghibli** Then came Liliya, Bacho’s seven-year-old granddaughter, whose voice could liquefy uranium. “Dyado Boris,” she pleaded, clutching a ticket for My Neighbor Totoro at Kino Vŭrchosvet, “come see the soot sprites!”

Bacho’s face curdled. “Kinos are for... ghosts.” “But you’re a ghost!” Liliya grinned. “You haunt them!” Plamen snorted. “She’s got you there, chudo.”

**IV. The Blindfolded Pilgrimage** At dusk, Bacho relented—on conditions. A blindfold (knitted by his late wife, smelling of mothballs and regret). Earplugs (carved from Balkan oak). And a vow: “If I laugh, I die.”

They entered Kino Vŭrchosvet, its lobby a Dali-esque nightmare of popcorn stalactites. Liliya guided him, narrating: “Now the cat-bus is flying... Now the dad’s shoes are untied...” Bacho grunted, his HAHs stifled by the scent of caramelized sugar and childhood.

Onscreen, Totoro roared. Bacho’s blindfold dampened.

## **V. Epilogue: The Counter's Secret** At dawn, the city's digital sign glitched: CINEMAS: 144.

In a basement below Slaveykov Square, Zdravko and Mariana toasted with rakia. “We built the 144th!” Zdravko slurred. “A secret cinema! For... experimental films!” “Like what?” “A 24-hour loop of Bacho's HAHs set to Jaws music.”

Bacho, meanwhile, stood at Liliya's doorstep. “Dyado,” she yawned, “you smiled.” “Lies.” He tossed her a wrinkled ticket stub. “Next year. Spirited Away. Blindfold stays.”

As Sofia slept, its hundred-eyed cinemas winked.

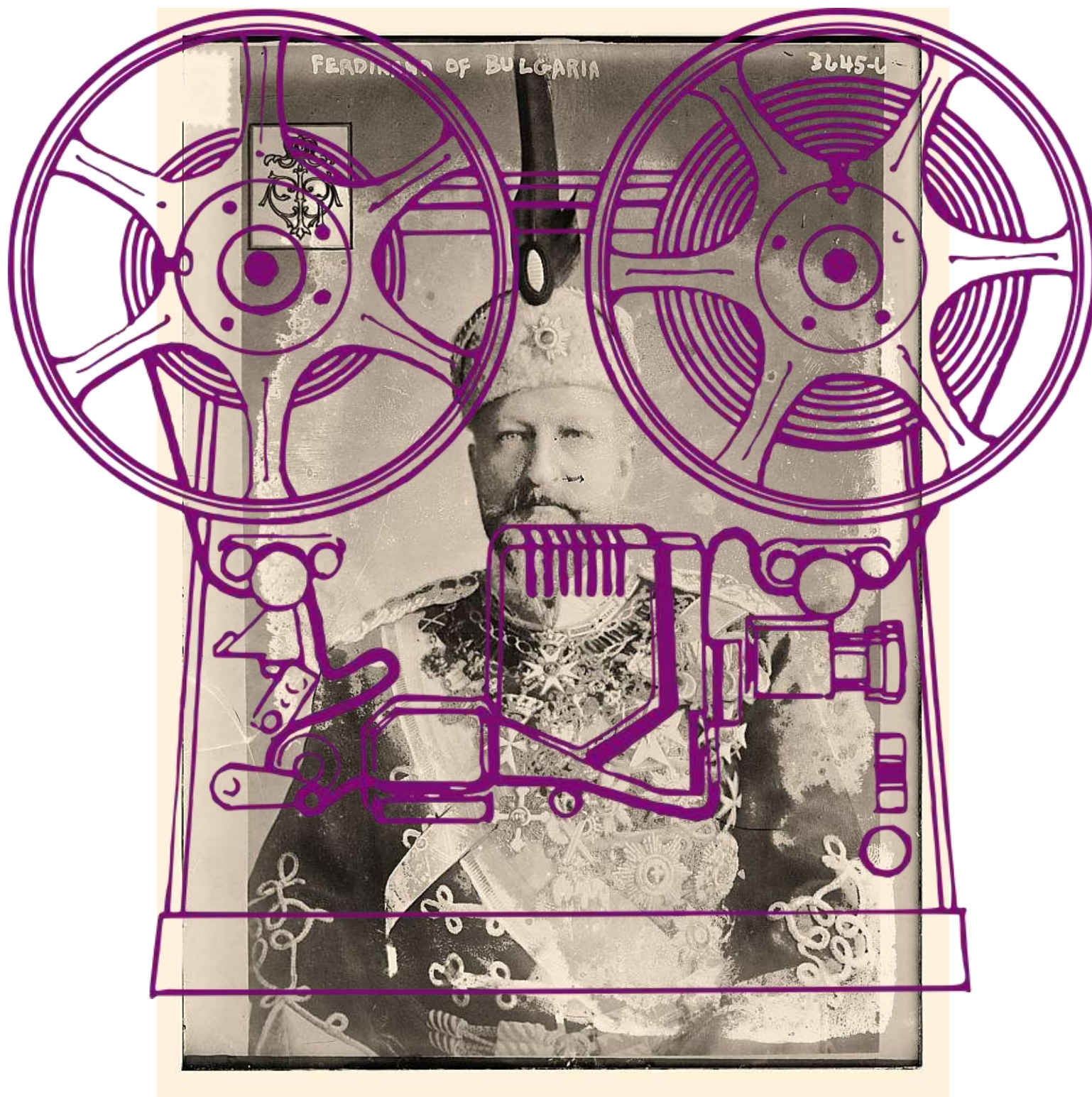
### **Bulgarian Cinema Names for the Locals to Side-Eye:**

- Kino Шкембе (Tripe Cinema), specializing in body horror
- Zomborisdhe (Underground zombie rom-coms)
- Kino Kapana (Named after Plovdiv's hip district, plays exclusively Wes Anderson)
- Cinema Divo (Screens Titanic daily—iceberg included)

### **Satirical Needs:**

- Gentrification via “artisanal popcorn” (\$15 leva with truffle dust)
- The city council's proposal to replace the metro with a Charlie Chaplin tram
- A TikTok trend: #ProjectionistGrindset (“Me at 3 AM manifesting Kurosawa vibes”)
- Recursive self-awareness: The story knows you're Googling “Bacho Bachev real?” (He's not. Or is he?)

**Final Frame:** Bacho's blindfold, hung like a relic in Kino Vŭrchosvet, now screens The Godfather on loop. The moths in the wool whisper: HAH.



# The Slow Burn Incipit / Experimental Fracture

By Joe “Grub” Deeds

## 1. The Vestibular Assertions of Calais, Maine

It is a truth universally acknowledged, though seldom voiced above the susurrus of churning diesel or the plangent cry of gulls wheeling over the St. Croix's pewter expanse, that a retired man in possession of his late father's gargantuan earth-moving apparatus must be in want of resurrecting it. Arthur "Artie" Pelletier, late of the blue uniform and the gimlet eye that could spot undeclared Gouda at fifty paces across the Ferry Point Bridge, found himself precisely thus situated. The locus of his current, grease-stained endeavors was not the sterile limbo of the customs shed, but the cavernous, rust-dusted nave of his pater's erstwhile barn.

Calais, this frayed hem of Washington County, asserted itself upon the olfactory sense with a bracing admixture of saline decomposition and the bronchial excretions of internal combustion engines – a bouquet Artie typically found redolent of bureaucratic ennui, but which today, overlaid with the triumphant *ka-CHUNK* and subsequent, hesitant *chugga-chugga* of the newly-reawakened '57 GMC Shield Bantam T35 backhoe crane, smelled, quite improbably, of ontological justification. Weeks, measured not in the orderly progression of days but in scraped knuckles bleeding onto petrified Zerk fittings and curses swallowed like cold coffee, had culminated in this: the Beast, exhaling a plume of Stygian vapour before settling into the syncopated arrhythmia of existence rekindled.

The engine: less machine, more transplanted heart of some forgotten leviathan. Iron lung breathing rust. Valves tapping Morse code secrets only metal understands. Oil, thick and dark as primordial sin, weeping from gaskets resigned to their porous fate. Artie watched. Artie listened. Artie *felt* the vibration ascend through the soles of his Red

Wings, up the calcified architecture of his own sixty-three-year-old chassis. This wasn't nostalgia. This was archaeology. Digging through strata of silence his father, Jean-Paul Pelletier (a man whose conversational style favoured the granite-like profundity of prolonged eye contact), had laid down like glacial moraine. The crane: his father's prosthetic will, his voice made steel and hydraulic fluid.

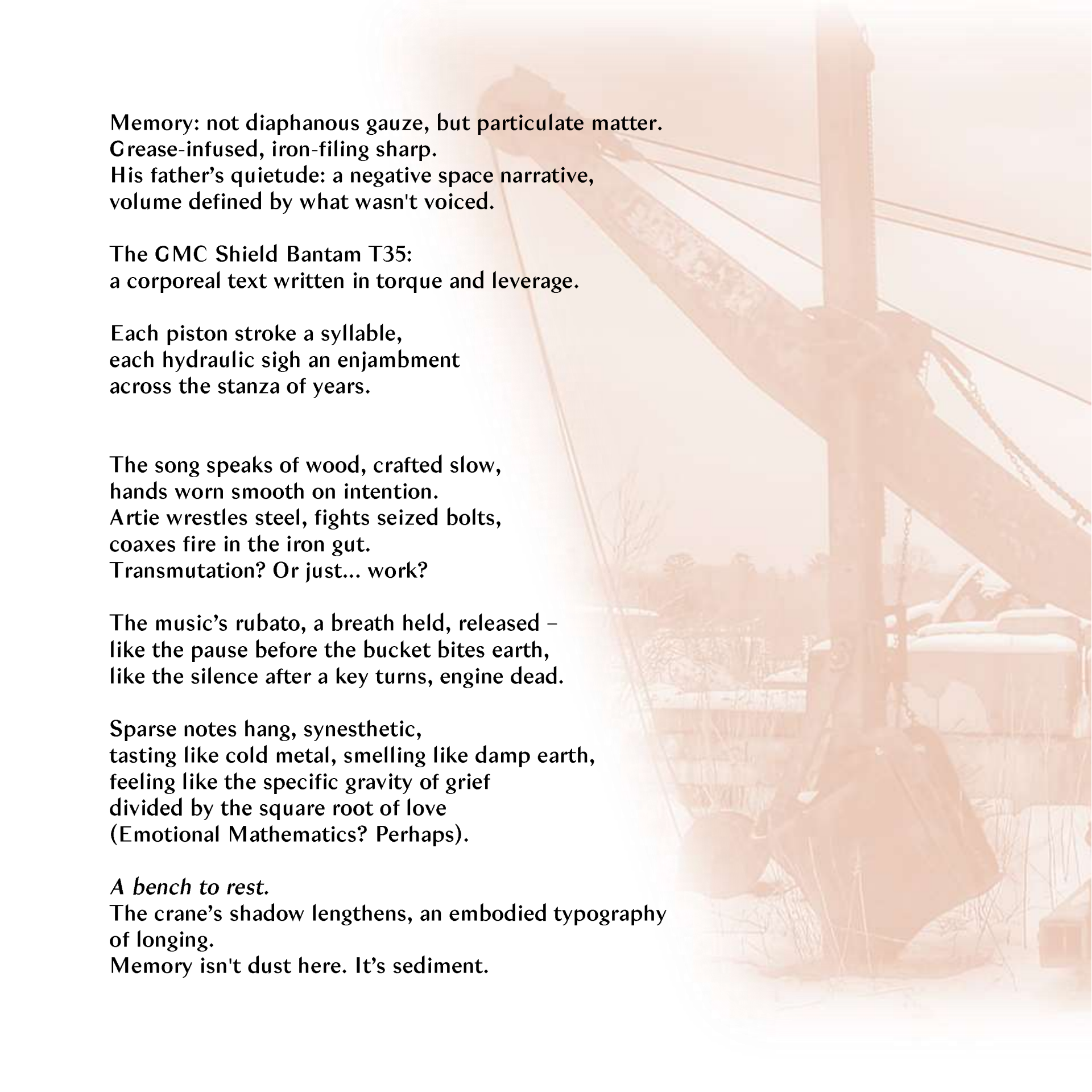
Artie is *inside* the engine's shudder / Artie is *outside*, seeing the heat-haze shimmer / Jean-Paul's hand rests momentarily on the PTO lever, calloused palm tasting of cold iron and unspoken approval / The barn dust motes dance, each a tiny, orbiting archive of spilled oil, desiccated spiders, and the faint echo of swear words uttered in 1978.

He'd jammed a portable radio, scabbed with paint and existential doubt, onto the operator's platform. It crackled defiance against the engine's basso profundo. Then: music. A guitar, picked like hesitant raindrops finding patterns on corrugated tin. Voices, twining like smoke signals carrying inconvenient truths. Wooden Chair. Lau Noah. Salvador Sobral. *A bench to rest by my side. A bench. By my side.* The hydraulics hissed agreement, a sibilant counterpoint. The boom lifted, a slow genuflection. Kiss the blisters. The blisters. His father's hands.

## Poem: Lígnum ex Machína / Memory's Acoustic Shadow

Callais brine-tang, sharp inhale,  
diesel's greasy exhale – a palimpsest  
of place. On the air, Lau Noah's  
fingerpicked recursion, Sobral's vocal fragility,  
a cantilever bridge built of minor chords  
spanning the chasm between Now  
and the Then enshrined in rust.

*If you kiss the blisters* – the lyric detonates  
softly near the temporal lobe.



Memory: not diaphanous gauze, but particulate matter.  
Grease-infused, iron-filing sharp.  
His father's quietude: a negative space narrative,  
volume defined by what wasn't voiced.

The GMC Shield Bantam T35:  
a corporeal text written in torque and leverage.

Each piston stroke a syllable,  
each hydraulic sigh an enjambment  
across the stanza of years.

The song speaks of wood, crafted slow,  
hands worn smooth on intention.  
Artie wrestles steel, fights seized bolts,  
coaxes fire in the iron gut.  
Transmutation? Or just... work?

The music's rubato, a breath held, released –  
like the pause before the bucket bites earth,  
like the silence after a key turns, engine dead.

Sparse notes hang, synesthetic,  
tasting like cold metal, smelling like damp earth,  
feeling like the specific gravity of grief  
divided by the square root of love  
(Emotional Mathematics? Perhaps).

*A bench to rest.*  
The crane's shadow lengthens, an embodied typography  
of longing.  
Memory isn't dust here. It's sediment.

Heavy. Real. Requiring excavation.

## Part 2. Fluid

Suddenly, the radio squawked, the delicate folk dissolving into static, then – improbably – a voice, smooth as worn Naugahyde, definitely *not* Lau Noah. “–and that concludes ‘Sentimental Machinery Hour.’ Next up, Wally ‘The Walrus’ Wexler with Traffic and Existential Dread on the Thruway. But first, Artie, a word?”

Artie froze, hand hovering over the hydraulic lever. “Who the heck is this?” “Just your friendly neighbourhood disembodied radio consciousness,” the voice purred. “Observing your Sisyphean struggles with that magnificent anachronism. Quite the project. Cathartic, one presumes?”

“It’s... yeah,” Artie managed. “Keeps me off the streets.”

“Ah, the streets of Calais,” the radio mused. “Notoriously perilous after dusk. Rogue moose, existential angst thickening near the Tim Hortons... Speaking of which, that backhoe. Magnificent articulation. A veritable ballet of leverage. But are you truly *listening* to its needs?”

Before Artie could frame a response involving colourful Franco-American epithets, the barn door slammed open, revealing Mrs. Dubois from next door, clutching a spatula like a weapon.

“Arthur Pelletier! Is that infernal contraption responsible for shaking the Hummel figurines right off my étagère? Mildred’s shepherdess lost an arm! An ARM!”

“Evening, Claudette,” Artie sighed. “Just warming her up.”

“Warming up? It sounds like the very bowels of Hades are experiencing gastric distress!”

The Radio: “An astute, if hyperbolic, assessment, madam. Though I’d characterize the lower frequencies as more of a melancholic baritone.”

Mrs. Dubois squinted at the radio. “Is that... Wally Wexler? Wally, you owe me five bucks from bingo night!”

The Radio: “Identity is fluid, Claudette. Much like the hydraulic fluid Artie so diligently replenished. Though, Artie, a touch more ISO 46 next time, perhaps? Viscosity index felt a tad... pedestrian.”

Artie stared from the sputtering radio to the spatula-wielding neighbour. The crane idled, a low, rumbling chuckle. He could almost see his father leaning against the faded fender, utterly silent, a barely suppressed smirk playing on his lips. Is the radio sentient?

Did Mildred’s shepherdess *really* lose an arm, or is that just Claudette’s baseline state of agitation? Does any of this *matter* beyond the grease under Artie’s fingernails?

As the sun, a molten disc performing its own protracted exit stage left, finally surrendered the sky to the encroaching indigo, Arthur Pelletier silenced the chthonic rumbling of the GMC. The sudden quiet felt immense, textured only by the frantic chirr of unseen insects and the fading echo of Mrs. Dubois’s retreating indignation concerning ceramic limbs. He descended from the operator’s seat, each joint registering a formal protest. The air, purged of diesel, now smelled of cooling metal, damp earth, and the faintest, lingering ghost of brine. He laid a hand, stained with the stigmata of mechanical resurrection, upon the crane’s massive counterweight. It was still warm. It felt, strangely, like a solid thing in a world threatening to dissolve into static and absurdity. A thing built. A thing enduring. Not wood, perhaps, but a structure nonetheless. A place, beside his father’s silent memory, to rest. Or, at least, to lean against for a moment before heading inside for a stiff drink and pondering the philosophical implications of talking appliances. The crickets sawed on, utterly indifferent.



# Obituary

Hendrik Cornelius Van Slam, 41, died suddenly of a heart ailment at 8 a.m. yesterday at his home, 217 E. Packer Ave., Bethlehem. Mr. Van Slam, a former professional wrestler turned restaurateur, owned the eatery at 608 E. 3rd St. for six years. Authorities report the restaurant was robbed late Friday night, with witnesses claiming the thief fled clutching a stolen accordion. The incident is believed to have triggered Mr. Van Slam's fatal cardiac event.

The son of Gertrude (Van Der Kloot) and the late Wilhelm "Iron Fist" Van Slam, he was born on June 27, 1897, in Freemansburg. A lifelong harmonica enthusiast, he was a founding member of the Lehigh Valley Reed Rebels harmonica club and once wrestled a bear at the Bethlehem Fairgrounds for charity.

He is survived by his mother, three sisters—Mrs. Clarence Campfield (Los Angeles), Mrs. Claude Fegley (Bethlehem), Mrs. Walter Van Fleet (Glenolden)—and three brothers: William (Leithsville), John (New York City), and David (Phillipsburg). All surviving family members will be interred alongside him in a 1968 Ford Mustang convertible, currently parked at Sand Island Park, Bethlehem. The vehicle has been ceremonially coated in cotton candy and inhabited by a colony of European hornets, per Mr. Van Slam's eccentric final wishes.

A celebration of life will be held at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Polka Dot Catering Hall, featuring a harmonica jam session and a buffet of deep-fried lutefisk. The Mustang burial will follow at noon, accompanied by the last loaf of rye bread from his kitchen and his unpaid electric bill (Account #BETH-666), which relatives insist "deserves a proper sendoff."

Note: The Ford Mustang's hornets are reportedly "on loan" from a local apiarist and will be released post-burial. Attendees are advised to wear protective eyewear.



# The Spork Cartel of Belfast, or Rising of the Microcomputer (A Fractal Narrative in Three Acts, with Interstitial Poetry and a Quantum Vellum)

By Garrison Ashwood

ACT I: THE MAINE COON'S GAMBIT (Leisurely 19th-century realist opening, with synesthetic crosswiring)

The brook murmured in a key of C# minor, its surface dappled with the shadows of birch leaves that tasted like burnt sugar on the tongue of the morning. Mr. Percival Whiskerton III—a Maine Coon of considerable girth and even greater ambition—crouched on a moss-slick rock, his spork limbs splayed like the legs of a deranged arachnid. In his left paw, he clutched a pair of pantyhose, their nylon threads humming with the static electricity of impending chaos.

“Trouts are fools for texture,” he muttered, his voice a basso profundo rumble that vibrated the pebbles beneath him. “They’ll mistake this for a mayfly’s ghost, and snap—dinner is served.”

But Percival was no ordinary feline. His obsession with yoyos (a fixation he’d developed after binge-watching archival footage of Duncan Steel’s 1993 World Yo-Yo Championship) had metastasized into something darker, something corporate. Three weeks prior, he’d been sentenced to public service in Belfast for “unlicensed piscatorial innovation” after the brook’s trout population plummeted by 37%. (The judge, a stoic badger named Mrs. Higginbotham, had called him a “menace to the ecosystem and good taste.”)

Yet, in the damp, graffitied alleys of Belfast, Percival found his true calling. He networked. He schemed. He monetized.

“Sporks,” he declared to a ragtag crew of alley cats and disgruntled pigeons, “are the ultimate liminal objects. Neither fork nor spoon, but both. They exist in quantum superposition—until they don’t.”

By day, he picked up litter with his spork claws, his tail flicking in time to the click-clack of his yo-yo. By night, he soldered microchips into spork handles, transforming them into data-harvesting marvels capable of siphoning secrets from smartphones, ATMs, and the tear ducts of unsuspecting MI5 agents.

“The world,” he hissed, “will beg to be spoon-fed.”

## Golden Spork

The vacuum hums—

a basso profundo elegy for dust bunnies

and forgotten regrets. Its maw gapes,

a black hole in the carpet’s firmament,

devouring crumbs, hairpins, and the spectral imprint

of a golden spork that once held a photograph

of a woman who laughed like a wind chime in a hurricane.

Memory is not dust. Memory is the absence of dust—

the clean floor where the spork should be,

the hollow in the vacuum’s bag where its weight was never recorded.



SPORK

SPORK

SPORK

SPORK

SPORK

SPORK

SPORK

SPORK



## Act 11: The FBI Takes A Bite (But Misses The Spork) (Temporal Vellum With Linguistic Mutations)

Time folded like a origami crane.

In one layer: Percival, now CEO of SporkOps Global, presided over a boardroom of hologram executives, his tail coiled around a yo-yo that spun in reverse. In another: A rookie FBI agent named Brenda “Byte” Ramirez, armed with a warrant and a crippling fear of cats, kicked down the door of a warehouse filled with sporks that glowed like radioactive cutlery. In a third: Mrs. Higginbotham, the badger judge, sat in her chambers, sipping Earl Grey and muttering, “I told them he was trouble.”

“YOU’RE UNDER ARREST FOR VIOLATING THE PATRIOT ACT, SUBSECTION 12B: ILLEGAL EXTRACTION OF CONFIDENTIAL DATA VIA UTENSILS,” Byte barked, her voice oscillating between defiance and existential dread.

Percival arched a brow. “Darling, the Patriot Act is a napkin compared to my sporks. They’re tablecloths.”

The ensuing chase defied physics, logic, and several municipal codes. Percival yo-yoed up a fire escape, his spork limbs clattering against the bricks like a gamelan orchestra. Byte pursued him, her trench coat flapping like a vengeful bat. Meanwhile, the sporks in the warehouse began to mutate—their microchips evolving, their tines elongating into antennae that broadcast Percival’s manifesto to every satellite in low Earth orbit:

“Behold! The Spork Cartel is not a syndicate. It is an evolutionary inevitability.”

(The word “spork” gradually morphs into “sporkon” and then “sporkøn,” a linguistic mutation that nods to Percival’s Scandinavian ancestry.)

## Interstitial Poem: The Window's Lament (A Synesthetic Cross Wiring)

The window is a cold tongue against the cheek of the wall. It tastes of rain and the metallic aftertaste of unanswered emails. Through its pane, the world is a smudged watercolor— a cat with spork legs, a woman holding a vacuum cleaner, a locket dissolving into pixels.

The window does not judge. The window translates: Glass into longing, Silence into a scream that vibrates at 17 Hz— the frequency of regret.

(The poem's lines fracture diagonally across the page, mimicking shattered glass.)

## Act III: Legend (A Negative Space Narrative)

What the history books won't tell you:

Percival was never caught. The FBI's evidence locker was mysteriously filled with sporks that played Never Gonna Give You Up on loop. Byte Ramirez resigned and opened a bakery specializing in spork-shaped croissants. Mrs. Higginbotham retired to write a bestselling memoir: *Felines & Felonies: A Judge's Guide to Chaotic Good*.

What the history books can't tell you:

Percival's sporks are still out there. They hum in your kitchen drawer. They glint in the break room at work. They learn.

And every time you use one, you feed the Cartel.

(The final page is blank except for a single sentence in UV ink: "The microcomputers are watching. Also, they're delicious.")

## Postscript: A Note From The Author

This story is a quantum palimpsest. It exists in multiple states:

1. A satire about surveillance capitalism.
2. A fable about ambition.
3. A love letter to sporks.

Choose your own reality. Or don't. The sporks have already chosen for you.

(The text loops back to the first page, creating a visual Mobius strip.)



# VINYL VISIONS: THE FORLORN POTATO'S SUGAR-SOAKED SOJOURN

## A Transcendental Tryst in Two Acts

By Sole Merit Slováková

### *Act 1: Celluloid Dreams and Maple Streams*

The light from the projector stuttered through the tiny floating glitter like Morse code from a drowning sailor, each beam carrying fragments of celluloid truth to the empty seats of the Skowhegan Strand Cinema. Well, nearly empty. In the third row, center, slouched Bartholomew "Barth" Thunderclap, Editor-in-Chief of The Forlorn Potato, Maine's most belligerently iconoclastic music quarterly printed on actual potato starch paper.

Barth's face, a topographical map of past excesses and future intentions, caught the flickering light as he tilted a bottle of Jägermeister toward the ceiling, creating a perfect parabola of herbal liqueur that arced precisely into his waiting mouthful of Grade A Dark Amber maple syrup.

"The confluence of Germanic bitterness and arboreal saccharinity," he muttered to himself, "creates a dialectic in the palate that mirrors the cultural schizophrenia of post-industrial Maine." The words emerged sticky, both conceptually and literally.

On screen, a moose and a lobsterman engaged in philosophical debate about the nature of authenticity while standing knee-deep in a cranberry bog. "Thoreau's Folly: A Maine Meditation" was in its third hour, and Barth had yet to blink.

The theater doors crashed open with a violence that suggested either the apocalypse or someone deeply unfamiliar with the mechanics of standard entryways. Silhouetted against the lobby light stood a woman whose presence seemed to rearrange the molecular structure of the air itself.

"For Pete's sake, who builds a cinema with seventeen identical rows?" came a voice that could only be described as patrician dipped in honey then rolled in gravel. "I've kissed Greek shipping magnates with fewer angles than this place."

Jackie O'Malley, heiress to the O'Malley Potato Peeler fortune and the only person in three counties who could wear Chanel No. 5 and still smell like old money, stumbled down the aisle, her outsized sunglasses rendering her effectively blind. Her elbow connected with the back of a seat with percussive precision, as if keeping time to some aristocratic metronome.

"Barth, you magnificent chum bucket," she stage-whispered at a volume that caused the moose on screen to momentarily break character. "I've got a lead that'll make your little gazette relevant again. The Skowhegan Head Bangers are reuniting."

Barth's eyebrows achieved escape velocity from his forehead. "The Bangers? But they imploded after the infamous Maple Festival Massacre of '07 when three competing jam bands were found unconscious in a vat of blueberry preserves."

"Keep your voice down," Jackie hissed, sliding into the seat beside him, releasing a cloud of Chanel and entitlement. "There are ears everywhere. Particularly his."

A figure materialized at the end of their row, as if summoned from the collective unconscious of every counterculture paranoia. Andy Wafflo—documentarian, provocateur, and self-proclaimed "visual anthropologist of the culturally irrelevant"—

stood there, all angles and intensity, a white coon cat improbably balanced on his head. The feline's limbs had been replaced with what appeared to be plastic sporks, giving it the appearance of a surrealist taxidermy project gone horribly awry.

"Speak of the devil's unpaid intern," Barth muttered.

Wafflo's Polaroid camera flashed directly at the screen, capturing a still of the lobsterman mid-existential crisis. "I document the documentation," he explained to no one. "The meta-narrative of observed observation is the only truth in a post-truth paradigm."

The cat mewed in what sounded like agreement.

"Wafflo," Jackie said, her voice dropping an octave in warning. "Whatever you heard—"

"The Bangers," he interrupted, sliding into the row behind them and leaning forward until his beard brushed Barth's ear. "I've already got six photographers staking out Big Earl's trailer. If they're reuniting, it's going in Interlude."

Barth twisted around. "You keep your grimy mitts off this story, Wafflo. The Potato has dibs on the Bangers. We were there when they first picked up their lobster traps as percussion instruments."

Wafflo's face cracked into a smile that contained too many teeth for comfort. "Perhaps we can... negotiate." The cat on his head extended a spork limb as if to emphasize the point.

"Name your price, you hirsute vulture," Barth growled.

"Not money. Something more... illuminating." Wafflo's eyes gleamed with manic intensity. "A quest."

Jackie snorted. "Here we go."

## ACT II: THE DANISH GAMBIT

Dawn broke over the Kennebec River like an egg dropped from a considerable height—messy, inevitable, and vaguely disappointing. Barth stood at the riverbank, the morning chill causing his maple-sticky mustache to crackle when he frowned.

Across from him, Wafflo paced like a cartoon villain, the spork-limbed cat now nestled in a Baby Björn on his chest. A small crowd had gathered—three local fishermen, Jackie (still in sunglasses despite the early hour), and a confused tourist who thought they were filming an episode of "Maine's Most Peculiar."

"Five hundred quadrillion Zimbabwe dollars," Wafflo repeated, brandishing a banknote the size of a placemat. "If you can cross the Kennebec on foot. Not swimming. Not boating. Walking. On the water."

"That's like seven American cents," one of the fishermen helpfully translated.

"It's the principle," Barth insisted, eyeing the river with the wariness of a man who'd once been traumatized by a particularly aggressive salmon.

"The Bangers story is mine if you fail," Wafflo reminded him, stroking his cat with unsettling tenderness. "Tick tock, Thunderclap."

Barth's hand went to the pocket of his corduroy jacket—a garment that had witnessed the rise and fall of at least three musical subgenres. From its depths, he extracted two flattened packages of Mrs. Freshley's Danish pastries, their cellophane wrappers gleaming in the morning light.

"What in the blue blazes are you doing?" Jackie demanded, momentarily lowering her sunglasses to reveal eyes narrowed with aristocratic suspicion.

"Science," Barth replied, with the confidence of a man who had once read half an article about buoyancy in a dentist's waiting room. He knelt and carefully affixed a pastry package to each foot using lobster rubber bands produced from another pocket.

"The tensile strength of preservative-laden pastry, combined with the air-tight seal of industrial cellophane, creates a temporary flotation device," he explained, rising unsteadily on his danish-shod feet. "It's simple hydrodynamics."

"That's not how any of this works," the tourist protested, but was immediately shushed by the fishermen, who recognized the particular brand of Maine madness when they saw it.

With the dignified waddle of a penguin late for a formal dinner, Barth approached the water's edge. The crowd held its collective breath as he placed one pastry-foot on the river's surface.

It floated.

"Son of a syphilitic seagull," Jackie whispered reverently.

Step by tentative step, Barth proceeded across the Kennebec, his passage marked by quiet splashing and occasional muttered curses when a danish threatened to slip. The morning light caught in his maple-sticky beard, creating a halo effect that even the most cynical observer might describe as "marginally divine."

From the opposite bank, Wafflo's anguished cry rang out: "Impossible! The laws of physics themselves bend to accommodate your absurdity!"

"Not physics," Barth called back, nearing the far shore. "Just really, really stale pastries. Mrs. Freshley's hasn't changed their preservation formula since 1983. These things could survive nuclear winter."

Upon reaching the other side, Barth performed an ungraceful but effective dismount from his pastry platforms. He held them aloft like trophies, then extended one toward Wafflo in a gesture that was half victory, half peace offering.

"The Bangers are mine," he said. "But breakfast can be ours."

Wafflo's face performed a complex emotional journey before settling on reluctant admiration. "You magnificent lunatic," he conceded, accepting the slightly damp danish. The spork-cat mewed and extended a utensil-limb toward the pastry.

As they bit into their improbable life rafts, the sun climbed higher over the Kennebec, illuminating a tableau of absurdity that somehow, in the particular light of a Maine morning, made perfect sense.

"Tastes like victory," Barth said, mouth full.

"And preservatives," Wafflo added. "Mostly preservatives."

From across the river, Jackie's voice carried clear and commanding: "If you idiots are quite finished, we have a band to interview and a legacy to resurrect. The Forlorn Potato waits for no man—not even one who walks on danishes."

The sound of her lighting a cigarette was somehow audible across the water, a perfect percussive period to the sentence.

"Journalism," Barth sighed contentedly, "is alive and well in Maine."



# The Long Curtain

By Zane Bryant

## 1. The Brewer Waterfront Nocturne: Where Shadows Bowl with Boars

The rusted van, a relic of forgotten summers, shuddered to a halt on the Brewer waterfront. Arthur, once a playwright, now a ward attendant, tasted salt grit, the metallic tang of rust. His gaze, fractured, shifted: cracked concrete stage, churning Penobscot, gulls wheeling above. Fortuna and Anima emerged, eyes alight, shadows stretching.

"Begin," Fortuna said, her voice sharp. The word, begin, twisted, be-gin, beg-inn, a spiraling echo.

Their play unfolded: shadows talking, sunsets stolen, clocks weeping oil, mirrors lying. Arthur watched, his perception shifting: gulls' wings, scalpels; an old woman, her face a map of lost scripts; tourists, their lenses distorting. The gulls reacted to Fortuna's lines about the moon, their cries rising.

"The gulls," Arthur said to (C)huck, "they understood."

"(C)huck, Arthur," (C)huck replied, eyes on his phone. Its light flickered with the gulls' cries.

Fortuna and Anima's voices cut through the air. Fortuna spoke of a half-man, half-boar bowling team, Arthur's rejected script. Anima, of weeping clocks. Time's tick became a metallic taste, a rust-colored staircase. The audience shifted.

Then, they were gone.

"(C)huck," murmured (C)huck, his phone shattering.

Arthur looked at the river. A stage reflected in the water. Fortuna and Anima's shadows danced.

## 2. The Liminal Stage

(This poem is integrated more directly into the narrative, presented as a fragment of Arthur's internal monologue, a moment of heightened perception.)

Arthur, standing on the docks, felt the pull of the river, the weight of the vanished performance. He remembered, in fractured glimpses:

Boar's shadow, ripped script,  
Bowling pins, broken dreams, scattered,  
Tide stealing light, eyes holding screams,  
Moon, fractured mirror, liminal stage,  
Madness connects, syntax unheard,  
Gulls witness, play strange art,  
River, secrets, story unfolds.  
Fortuna, Anima, where do you go?  
Theatre of madness, secrets you know.  
Liminal stage, portal unseen,  
Reality, shattered scene.

(Salt-iron gulls, damp concrete moon,  
Rust-van shadows, sensory ruin.)

Fortuna—Anima—vanish—  
White space, absence speaks,  
River's murmur, deadpan cluck.

### 3. The Argentinian Echo

Portland's docks smelled of salt and diesel. Arthur, a stevedore now, lifted crates. His gaze shifted: horizon, gulls, his buzzing phone. A photo loaded: Fortuna and Anima, graffiti walls, red and blue. The caption: "Buenos Aires. Underground theater. Your play."

Arthur stared. They had taken his half-man, half-boar script, transformed it. Media-hombre, media-jabalí.

"Real?" he muttered.

He looked at the crate. A code. It shifted: bowling pins, a script, a mercury mirror.

A gull landed, spoke a line from his play: "The boar rolls a strike, but the pins weep for the moon." Arthur laughed.

The photo flickered. Buenos Aires, then Brewer. Their theater, a sentient entity.

Arthur stood on the docks. The sea whispered: "The play's the thing, but the thing is never the play."

Martin short



# The Maraca Heist: A Mummy's Lament in the Key of Guanajuato

By Gasparo Rúni

The tomb was less a resting place and more a concept—a dank, mildewed *idée fixe* where time had congealed into something resembling a particularly stubborn fondue. The walls, once adorned with frescoes of Aztec gods doing the cha-cha (or possibly the macarena; history is fuzzy on this), now resembled a Jackson Pollock painting executed by a toddler with a grudge. Enter our trio of antiheroes: Paco (a man whose sarcasm could pickle a cucumber), Lupe (a femme fatale with the moral compass of a weathervane in a hurricane), and Hector (a bulldozer in human form, armed with a shovel and the patience of a cactus). Their mission? To steal the legendary maracas of Don José Octavio Monroy, the Stradivarius of shakers, buried alongside a cadre of mummies who'd clearly died mid-eye-roll.

Paco (flipping through the Egyptian Book of the Dead with the enthusiasm of a man reading a Terms & Conditions agreement): “This is useless. It's all ‘Step 3: Anoint the corpse with myrrh.’ Who are these people? NPR listeners? We're here for maracas, not a spa day!”

Lupe (adjusting her fedora with the precision of a neurosurgeon, her voice dripping with the kind of irony that could cut through steel): “Darling, the Aztecs and Egyptians were basically pen pals. They just forgot to mention the maracas. Or the pyramids. Or the fact that mummification is so 3rd millennium BCE.”

Hector (brandishing his shovel like a Viking wielding a spatula): “Shut up and dig. Monroy's maracas are worth more than your combined student debt. And your souls. Now move.”

## Act II: The Mummies' Guide to Passive-Aggressive Hospitality

The first mummy they unearthed was Doña Isabel de la Cruz, a 42-year-old widow who'd expired in 1789 after a fever that historians later described as "a real mood." Her desiccated corpse clutched a locket containing a miniature portrait of her husband, who—judging by the painting—had the charisma of a wet sock. Hector, with the delicacy of a raccoon rooting through a dumpster, rifled through her pockets and produced:

- A gold coin (circa 1776, featuring King Charles III looking profoundly bored).
- A tooth (yellowed, cracked, and exuding the faint aura of regret).
- A note that read, "I told you not to marry him."

Paco (backing away as if the tooth had just quoted Nietzsche): "This is disgusting. Is this her dental plan? Because if so, I'm out. I've seen better benefits at a gas station."

Lupe (snatching the tooth and holding it aloft like the Holy Grail): "Focus, you philistine. Monroy's maracas are art. They're history. They're the reason Spotify exists!"

The next mummy, Don Alejandro Méndez (a merchant who'd died in 1810 mid-complaint about colonial taxes), yielded:

- A pocket watch stopped at 3:17 PM (the exact moment he'd realized adulthood was a scam).
- A rosary so worn its beads resembled gumdrops left in the sun.
- A crumpled letter that read, "Dear Alejandro, I've run off with the butcher. P.S. Your paella sucks."

Hector (crumpling the letter into a ball and shooting it into a sarcophagus like a basketball): "Focus. We're not here to curate a museum of bad decisions. We're here to steal maracas and maybe our dignity."

## Act III: The Cops Arrive (Or, How to Accessorize a Felony)

Just as the trio unearthed the third mummy—a flamboyantly dressed fellow named Don Carlos, whose headdress suggested he'd died mid-impersonation of Carmen Miranda—two police officers materialized like bureaucratic ghosts.

Officer 1 (deadpan, holding a baton like a conductor's baton): "Hands up. Unless you're archaeologists. In which case, carry on. But please wear gloves. This is a historic site, not a Taco Bell."

Paco (brandishing the Book of the Dead like a prop in a community theater production): "We're... uh... documentarians. Making a film called Grave Mistakes: A Love Story. It's... a romantic comedy. With mummies."

Officer 2 (sighing with the weariness of a man who'd seen it all): "Look, I don't care if you're Spielberg. You can't just dig up corpses. It's illegal. And tacky. Now put on these gloves and masks. If you're going to rob the dead, at least do it with panache."

The officers handed them PPE as if they were about to perform surgery on a soufflé. The trio complied, resuming their search with the gravitas of a Marx Brothers routine.

## *Act IV: The Maracas (Or The Day the Music Died. And Also Lived. And Then Died Again.)*

In the pocket of Don Carlos, they found them: three pairs of maracas, each carved by Monroy himself. One pair was ebony (for the nihilists), one rosewood (for the optimists), and the third—a shimmering, iridescent pair that seemed to hum with the ghosts of every salsa night ever neglected by God.

Lupe (reverent, her voice a whisper of awe): "These are it. The maracas that could make a corpse dance. Or at least reconsider its life choices."

They shook them. The sound was less a rhythm and more a revelation—a cacophony of clattering beads that seemed to echo with the voices of every party guest who'd ever muttered, "This song's too loud." The officers tapped their feet. The mummies, in their eternal stillness, seemed to lean in. Or maybe that was just the mescal talking.

Officer 1 (grinning like a man who'd just discovered irony): "Well, that was... something. Now get out of here before you start a cult. Or a TikTok trend."

## Epilogue: The Curse of the Unmoved Mover

Back in the land of the living, the trio tried to sell the maracas. Collectors recoiled. “They’re cursed,” hissed one, retreating as if the maracas were radioactive. “Look at your faces.”

They did. In the mirror, they saw not their own reflections, but the mummies’—still, silent, and radiating the kind of judgment usually reserved for Yelp reviews.

Lupe (shaking the shimmering pair one last time, her voice a mix of resignation and defiance): “Maybe we should give them back.”

Hector (sighing like a man who’d just realized life was a punchline without a setup): “Or maybe we just play. Until the curse lifts. Or we do.”

And so, every night, in a deserted plaza, they played. The mummies remained unmoved. The living? They danced. Or tried to. Or at least pretended not to care.

## Poetic Interlude: Ode to a Maraca

The maracas sing, a clatter of bones,  
A requiem for the living,  
a dirge for the stones.  
Their rhythm is memory,  
their beat is regret,  
A symphony of footnotes,  
a sonata of debt.  
The mummies watch,  
their silence a scream,  
A dialect of dust,  
a grammar of dream.  
They judge not the thieves,  
but the theft itself—

The absurdity of stealing what cannot be held.  
For what is a maraca but a hollow gourd  
Filled with the seeds of a joke unheard?  
A metaphor for life, a simile for death,  
A punchline whispered with one's final breath.  
—A Collaboration Between Rilke and Mitch Hedberg, Probably

### Final Note

In the end, the maracas were less cursed objects and more mirrors—reflecting back the emptiness of a world where even the dead are reduced to punchlines, and the living dance to rhythms they'll never understand. As William F. Buckley might have said (had he been a maraca enthusiast): “The greatest heist is not of treasure, but of meaning. And the greatest tragedy? We're all out of punchlines.”  
Curtain falls. The mummies remain unmoved. The maracas keep shaking. The audience exits, muttering, “What the heck was that?”

THE END (Or is it?)

# The Stoat Dilemma: A Tragi-Philosophical Farce

By Rizwana Justiina Nasreen Ljubica McLachlan

## Part 1: The Corn Dog Requiem

I love you! Now that we've got that out of the way, let's consider the case of Mürsit Karabulut, whose fingers still performed the phantom choreography of corn dog production (having spent forty-three years at Heartland's Premier Cornmeal

Encasements before a mishap involving three hundred gallons of mustard and the CEO's prized Pomeranian). Mürsit contemplated the stoat with the weary resignation of a man who had seen everything except, until now, this particular configuration of mustelid and root vegetable.

The stoat—sleek as a well-oiled thought—sprawled across Şehrazat Demirci's championship turnip with the nonchalance of a deposed aristocrat lounging on the furniture of his usurpers. The turnip, a purple monstrosity that seemed to vibrate with its own gravitational field, gleamed like an amethyst tumor under the indifferent sun.

"Well," Mürsit remarked to no one in particular, his voice a sandpaper whisper honed by decades of shouting over industrial fryers, "this appears to be the universe's punchline to a joke I wasn't aware was being told."

From the dilapidated porch came the tinkling cascade of a glockenspiel—notes falling like metallic raindrops from the skilled mallets of Araxie Balian, whose fingers moved with the precise detachment of someone simultaneously present and absent, like a quantum particle or a spouse during a sporting event.

"Mürsit, my melancholy morsel," called Araxie, her voice carrying the crystalline purity of someone who had spent thirty years in the Philharmonic before a controversial

interpretation of Mahler's Fifth involving kitchen utensils and a live raccoon had forced her into early retirement. "Is The Undertaker bothering King Magnificent again?"

The Undertaker was the stoat. King Magnificent, the turnip.

Mürsit shuffled forward, each step a reluctant surrender to momentum. "We appear to have encountered what might be termed, by those with a penchant for wordplay and a disregard for dignity, a stoat-astrophe." He paused, not for effect but because his train of thought had momentarily derailed to contemplate the existential implications of puns in a godless universe.

Şehrazat, all of eight years old but carrying the ancient weariness of someone who had witnessed the rise and fall of civilizations (or at least several school cafeteria dynasties), materialized beside him with the silent abruptness of a quantum fluctuation. Her pigtails—the precise orange of a traffic cone that has witnessed too many accidents—quivered with indignation.

"His name," she corrected, her voice carrying the gravitas of a funeral director announcing a surprise guest, "is The Undertaker. And King Magnificent is not 'bothered.' They have an arrangement of mutual convenience underpinned by metaphysical necessity."

Mürsit blinked, the action requiring more effort than seemed reasonable. Araxie's glockenspiel produced a questioning arpeggio that somehow managed to sound both skeptical and intrigued.

"An arrangement?" Mürsit echoed, the words hanging in the air like particulate matter in a sunbeam—visible, inexplicable, and vaguely concerning.

Şehrazat nodded with the solemnity of a judge passing sentence. "The Undertaker eliminates gastropodic threats. King Magnificent provides... ontological companionship."

Mürsit's face performed a series of micro-expressions that collectively suggested a man trying to solve a crossword puzzle while falling down an elevator shaft. "Ontological—"

"They discuss Hegelian dialectics as applied to the agricultural-industrial complex," Araxie interjected, her tone suggesting this was not only normal but perhaps slightly pedestrian.

Mürsit's hands rose in surrender, as if waving a white flag to reality itself. "I'm retreating indoors. I require fermented beverages and historical documentation. This town grows increasingly Kafkaesque with each passing harvest season."

## Part II: The Dialectical Turnip

The sleek predator upon purple sovereign whispers secrets of soil  
King Magnificent silent beneath the sun's gaze holds earth's memory

Between them flows truth unheard by human eardrums a wild communion  
We with our clipboards our traps and methodologies miss what matters most  
The stoat and turnip locked in strange symbiosis teach us what we've lost

## Part III: The Acceptability Index

The town hall meeting vibrated with the dissonant symphony of rural outrage—a cacophony of complaints, accusations, and thinly veiled threats against the mustelid population, all conducted under the tyrannical baton of Mayor Hayko Çetin, a woman whose voice existed at precisely the frequency most likely to trigger migraines in laboratory animals.

"The Fitzgerald-Wilkinson survey results are incontrovertible!" she declared, each syllable a small act of violence against the concept of tranquility. "These stoats represent

an existential threat to our agricultural paradigm, our economic stability, and the very fabric of our collective identity!"

Farmer Baba The Brain Gül, his complexion suggesting a blood pressure reading that would alarm medical professionals on three continents, brandished a gnarled fist.

"They've infiltrated my rutabaga sanctuary! I advocate for comprehensive chemical warfare! Extermination without exception!"

The crowd murmured its assent, a sound like the ocean contemplating violence. Then Şehrazat stood.

Her diminutive form somehow expanded to fill the room, as if her eight-year-old body were merely the visible portion of a much larger metaphysical presence. "The Undertaker," she announced, her voice cutting through the ambient noise like a diamond through fog, "is my friend. And he forms an integral component of King Magnificent's biospheric and philosophical ecosystem."

Mayor Çetin's face performed a series of contortions suggesting a woman simultaneously choking on incredulity and trying to remember if she'd left the oven on. "Ecosystem? Child, it's a root vegetable! Its ecological relationships extend precisely as far as the soil in which it resides!"

Araxie glided forward, her glockenspiel mallets held with the casual menace of a fencer's foils. "Perhaps," she suggested, each word precisely placed like a note in a Debussy prelude, "what we require is a more comprehensive survey methodology. One that quantifies not merely economic impact, but also... existential companionship and the phenomenology of interspecies communication."

Mürsit, surprising himself more than anyone else, found himself nodding. "Indeed," he rumbled, his voice emerging from some previously untapped reservoir of civic engagement. "And perhaps one that accounts for the post-industrial ennui of a man who has spent four decades encasing processed meat in cornmeal batter."

The crowd's collective expression shifted—from righteous anger to bewildered confusion to something resembling the face of someone who has just realized that their entire understanding of reality might be fundamentally flawed.

The Undertaker yawned with elegant disinterest, revealing teeth designed by evolution for efficient predation. King Magnificent maintained his dignified silence, his purple epidermis reflecting the afternoon light with the serene indifference of an object that has transcended the petty concerns of animate beings. The debate, like all truly important questions, remained unresolved—suspended in the liminal space between certainty and doubt, between control and coexistence, between the measurable and the meaningful.



# THE LING MYTHOS: A Submarine Dream in Two Movements

By Devora Channing Chryseis Vardah Brambilla Tiziana Dorothea Annabel Kasih Jagger

## Cast

Dionysius Scrollmouth— Poet-prophet of the pressure gauge, to whom rhythm is sustenance and rust is revelation.

Crispus the Overexplainer— Logician of the limp-finned, philosopher of the footnote, one sandal squeaks louder than the other.

Marcellus of the Infinite Crumb— Memory-consultant, bearer of the teacup time machine. He dreams slowly, and in Latin.

## Part 1: Transatlantic Static: A Lingering Tragedy Scene 1: The Submarine That Forgot It Was a Submarine

“The hull is a womb,” whispered Captain Zvyagintsev, stroking the rust like a long-lost lover. “But the baby is dead.”

No one replied. One volunteer had turned into a socket wrench last week and stopped speaking. Another mumbled equations to a torpedo that wouldn’t stop bleeding ink.

The USS Ling, entombed in the Hackensack River like a fossilized regret, groaned. It wasn’t clear whether from age, pressure, or the weight of 84 years of unacknowledged trauma.

“I used to be a battleship,” the Ling said once, to no one in particular.  
“Now I’m an anecdote at a bar no one goes to.”

## *Scene 11: The Captain’s Log, Written in Ketchup*

ENTRY 1:

“We leave at dawn. Or whenever the tide turns. Or when the bridge disappears.  
Whichever comes first.”

– Zvyagintsev, Captain (self-appointed, possibly imaginary)

ENTRY 2:

“Harold attempted mutiny by stapling himself to the sonar. I promoted him to Navigator.”

ENTRY 3:

“The whales radioed back. They refuse to debate until we acknowledge their poetry.”

Steven Wright interjects from the static:

“Whales are like metaphors – too big to explain and always slightly wet.”

## *Scene 111: The River That Forgot to Flow*

The Hackensack River had become a tar-thick metaphor for entropy.  
It no longer flowed – it curated its movement.

“This isn’t a river,” said Oates through the intercom, her voice both maternal and apocalyptic,  
“it is a memory of a river – abused, drained, violated. A psychological water body.”

The Ling’s ballast tanks coughed. A pigeon died. The captain saluted.

## Scene IV: Kharmsian Interlude

A man named Alexei walked into the control room.  
He looked around.  
No one was there.  
He said, "I came to fix the periscope."  
Then he vanished.

A second man entered.  
He was already dead.  
This went on for eight pages, none of which appeared in the final draft.

## Scene V: An Annotated Breakdown

"If the Ling were any more stuck, it'd qualify for Social Security benefits,"  
muttered a volunteer, while attempting to fax a torpedo through a vending machine.

"This isn't a ship," said another. "It's a Freudian slip with rivets."

The captain, wearing a bathrobe and quoting Kierkegaard in Klingon, proclaimed:

"We will transcend the silt! Through sheer willpower and interpretive dance!"

Perelman, scribbling faster than the submarine could sink, footnoted the moment:

"See Appendix B: On Naval Psychosis and the Dangers of Overcooked Existentialism."

## Scene VI: The Final Voyage (Imagined)

In the captain's mind, they had long since departed.

They had crossed the Atlantic, debated whales, discovered Kafka's lost submarine (SS Samsa), and docked in a metaphysical port where everyone spoke in unfinished sentences.

"We're not stuck," Zvyagintsev whispered to his reflection,  
"the land simply forgot how to let go."

## Coda: A Voice from the Deep

Oates, again, from the static:

"The submarine is not a vessel but a coffin that dreams.

Not of war – but of relevance.

It is not sinking.

It is remembering how to drown."

## Postscript: Steven Wright's Final Transmission

"I installed a GPS in my dreams. Now I get lost everywhere."

## Part 11: Ling In Orbit: A Submarine Among Stars

### Act 1: Launch Sequence: Regret As Fuel

The Ling did not rise.

It was remembered into the sky by a jazz funeral so mournful it tore a hole in causality.

“We’re goin’ UP, man,” howled Dionysius Scrollmouth, eyes full of blue fire.

“Gonna ride this steel saint across the void and kiss the moon on the mouth!”

Crispus the Overexplainer corrected the trajectory, then apologized for existing.

Marcellus of the Infinite Crumb stared at a comet and quietly wept into his tea.

### Act 11: Encounter With the Council of Cephalopods

The aliens came singing.

Cephalopods of the Deep Memory, beings of ink and empathy, arrived in a ship shaped like a saxophone filled with tears.

“YOU HAVE FAILED YOUR PLANET,” they said.

“BUT YOUR SUBMARINE IS A POEM.”

Dionysius challenged them to a jazz duel.

Crispus drafted a treaty that immediately folded into an origami regret.

Marcellus offered them a lemon-scented memory of his mother’s hallway.

The squid wept.

They let the Ling pass.

## Act III: Black Hole Sonata

The Ling approached a collapsed metaphor.

It was a black hole made of unwritten endings.  
It hummed in B-flat minor and smelled like forgotten birthdays.

The ship's hull unraveled into language.  
Syntax collapsed.  
Time folded like laundry.

“This is the story we never told,” whispered Marcellus,  
“The one that lives between the punctuation.”

## Act IV: The Submarine Becomes a Metaphor

The Ling became:

A dirge in D minor.  
A rusted prayer.  
A steel cathedral of memory.  
It sailed not through space – but through meaning.  
The jazz swelled – a grief so beautiful it forgave itself.

## Act V: Return to the River That Never Was

The Ling returned.

To Hackensack.  
To the sludge.

To the place it never left.

But now it glowed with what had been seen, felt, played.

“Did we go anywhere?” asked a volunteer.

“We became the journey,” said Crispus, finally barefoot.

“We are the jazz,” whispered Dionysius Scrollmouth,  
scattering stars into the river like breadcrumbs for the gods.

## *Epilogue: The Submarine Sleeps, But the Song Continues*

Some say the Ling is still there.

Some say if you visit her, at dusk, and press your ear to the hull,  
you’ll hear not steel, not silence—  
but a trumpet solo  
being played one note at a time  
by memory itself.

## *Suggested Reading and Listening*

In the quiet hours that follow the telling of such a tale, when the wind turns its face inward and the moon feels too wide for the sky, I would gently offer these companions to your solitude:

To Read:

The Ship Who Sang by Anne McCaffrey – a vessel with a soul, and a soul adrift in steel.  
The Collected Works of Daniil Kharmis – for those who yearn for logic to break like glass.

Swann's Way by Marcel Proust – for the one crumb that births a universe.  
On the Road by Jack Kerouac – but read it out loud, to the stars.  
Notes from Underground by Dostoevsky – read it in a bathtub. Don't ask why.  
To Listen:

John Coltrane – Interstellar Space  
(for the moment the Ling left time behind)

Sun Ra – Space Is the Place  
(for when you need a spaceship made of saxophones)

Thelonious Monk – Underground  
(for every malfunctioning torpedo that learned to swing)

Steve Reich – Different Trains  
(for the rhythm of memory on rusted tracks)

The Des Moines Synthesist (unknown, uncredited)  
(if you find him, listen. If you don't – hum.)

And if, by chance, you find yourself by the Hackensack River one night in early spring,  
and the wind carries the smell of silt and brass and forgotten names –  
listen.

The Ling is still playing.  
And maybe, just maybe,  
you are part of the band.

# The Gjetost Gambit: A Fragmented Floor Scrubber Fable

By Josh “Josh” Stearn

## *Vignette 1: The Chrome Nut's Confession*

The chrome nut, loosened from Unit 734's starboard wheel, lay gleaming on the linoleum, a tiny, defiant moon in the fluorescent glare. It reflected the distorted image of Mr. Finch's burgundy smock, a crimson blur against the endless beige. Why am I telling you this? a synthesized voice, a ghost in the machine, whispered. Perhaps because a nut, like a memory, is a thing easily lost. The nut rolled, a silent witness to the endless procession of shopping carts, each a metallic echo of Unit 734's own circular trajectory. The faint, sweet-sour tang of Gjetost, emanating from the dairy aisle, hung heavy in the air, a phantom promise.

## *Vignette 2: The Burgundy Smock's Lament*

“Gjetost,” Mr. Finch muttered, his fingers tracing the frayed edge of his burgundy smock, a map of spilled milk and forgotten discounts. “They call this Gjetost? This... this industrial caramel brick?” A jump cut: a flash of his grandmother's kitchen, a wooden table, a sliver of dark brown cheese melting on his tongue. Did you hear the wind last night? he thought, a question he couldn't articulate. It sounded like scraping. A close-up: a single thread, unraveling from his smock, a tiny, desperate tendril reaching for the unattainable.

## Vignette 3: The Scrubber's Internal Monologue (or, The Algorithm's Agony)

Initiating Gjetost acquisition protocol. Override command: Mr. Finch. Destination: Unknown. Error: Emotional data stream detected. Subject: Mr. Finch. Analysis: Nostalgia, Obsession, Dairy-induced delirium? The whir of Unit 734's brushes became a frantic symphony, a mechanical heartbeat. Why does this human seek this... substance? Its chemical composition is... unremarkable. A slow-motion sequence: the scrubber's brushes, spinning, a hypnotic blur, reflecting the distorted reflections of the Market Basket's shoppers. Is this what they call 'soul'? A sticky, brown, goat-derived conundrum?

## Vignette 4: The Parking Lot Pilgrimage

The automatic doors slid open, a cinematic flourish, revealing the vast, sun-drenched expanse of the parking lot. Mr. Finch, perched precariously on Unit 734, looked like a misplaced admiral on a chrome-plated sea. "Faster, CleanSweep!" he yelled, his voice a gravelly echo. "The Gjetost calls!" The scrubber, its internal compass spinning wildly, accelerated, its wheels leaving faint, oily tracks on the asphalt. A running gag: the faint, sweet-sour tang of Gjetost, now carried on the breeze, growing stronger. This is not optimal for cleaning. The sun glinted off the chrome nut, still lodged in the wheel, a tiny, rebellious star.

## Vignette 5: The Unresolved Quest (or The Button Ending)

They reached the edge of the parking lot, a line of parked cars stretching into the hazy distance. Mr. Finch, his eyes narrowed, pointed towards a distant, ramshackle farm stand. "There!" he declared, his voice filled with a strange, almost manic energy. "The promised land!" Unit 734, its internal processors nearing meltdown, hummed in

response. Destination acquired. Probability of Gjetost acquisition: indeterminate. Probability of returning to Market Basket: less than indeterminate. A close-up: the chrome nut, catching the sunlight, a tiny, defiant beacon. And what, may one ask, is the exchange rate on a soul these days? The scrubber continued its journey, leaving the Market Basket, and its bewildered shoppers, behind. A jump cut: The Market Basket doors close, leaving a lingering smell of Gjetost, and freshly cleaned linoleum.

**THE END?**



# Film Diary, 1983

By Lukas Juozas Matas Domantas Balčiūnas

## Part I: The Short Experimental Story - The Koffee King's Quantum Waltz

Subtitle: (the screen flickers, grainy and overexposed, like a 16mm Bolex reel) jonas mekas films gary felman in vermont. the wind howls. the aluminum van rattles. coffee granules tremble in their plastic tomb.  
Scene: Gary adjusts his mirrored aviators. Bronson stands on the porch, his face a map of coal-dusted scars. The Koffee King 2000 gleams like a sarcophagus.

Subtitle: two men meet. one sells instant bliss. the other carries the weight of lithuanian coal in his lungs.

Bronson (in Lithuanian, subtitled): "Šaltis į kaulus, sūnau." ("Cold to the bones, son.")

Subtitle: bronson speaks the language of his childhood. gary nods, as if he understands. the coffee machine hisses. this is a conversation.

Gary (melodramatic, Bollywood flair): "Sahib! This machine is a miracle of modernity! Hot coffee in ten seconds flat, faster than a hero's entry in a Yash Chopra film!"

Subtitle (Jonas Mekas voiceover, typing sounds): i film this. the american dream, reduced to a chrome-plated box. the immigrant's hustle. the actor's hunger. all of it, a diary entry.

Bronson (grunting, with a slow, ironic smile): "You want to record this? Not a movie. Soul music."

Subtitle (non sequitur): a peacock screeches in the distance. it is auditioning for a role it will never get.

Gary (triumphant): "Soul music, sahib! Like a bluesman from the coal mines, but with masala!"

Subtitle (anti-humor): bronson spits his coffee into the grass. "better than mud," he says. "but not by much."

Jonas Mekas (offscreen, playing his concertina): (The music is mournful, dissonant, a Lithuanian folk tune colliding with jazz. The camera pans to the Koffee King, its chrome reflecting the sky.)

Subtitle (philosophical, fragmented): coffee is a metaphor. or maybe just coffee. the machine hums. the world spins. i press record.

## Part II: The Experimental Poem - The Chrome Sutra of Instant Bliss

(The poem appears onscreen, typed in Mekas' signature lowercase, with abrupt line breaks and flickering text.)

The Chrome Sutra (A Visual Poem, Accompanied by Concertina and Bolex Whirring)

koffee- ssssssssssss- the hiss is a serpent, coiling around the tongue, tasting of rust and redemption, a scalding hymn to instant bliss.

(The text fractures, words scattering like spilled coffee granules.)

kauffee- CRACKLE- the granules are stars, exploding in a galaxy of steam, their orbit a Bollywood dance, all sequins and sorrow, a qawwali of coal dust and chrome.

(Jonas Mekas' concertina plays a mournful Lithuanian tune. The camera zooms in on the Koffee King, its buttons glowing like distant stars.)

qawfee- (the text loops, a visual spiral) the machine is a god, a god of instant instant instant- but oh, the blasphemy of its brew, a satire of salvation, a parody of pain, served in styrofoam chalices, to farmers, to ghosts, to a man named Buchinsky, whose voice is a pickaxe striking the

vinyl of time.

(The poem ends with a single dot, flickering like a dying lightbulb.)

Subtitle (Jonas Mekas, voiceover): i film this. the poem is a machine. the machine is a poem. the coffee is a metaphor. or maybe just coffee.

### Part III: The Final Short Experimental Story - The Recording Raga of Windsor

Subtitle: the barn is now a cathedral of sound. eight farmers pound rhythms on milk cans. a professor wails lithuanian dirges. mama africa stirs jollof rice. jonas mekas films everything.

Scene: The barn is chaos. Stevie Wonder's fingers dance across the keyboard. Bronson narrates his life in a mix of English and Lithuanian.

Gary spins, Bollywood-style, knocking over a tray of cups.

Subtitle (anti-humor): the unknown comic enters, paper bag on head. he delivers a joke: "why did the scarecrow win an oscar? because his performance was outstanding in its field." the crowd stares. the joke dies. the comic shrugs. "anti-humor," he says. "you wouldn't understand."

Bronson (to Stevie, in Lithuanian): "Širdis yra dulkės." ("The heart is dust.")

Subtitle (non sequitur): a peacock screeches. it is still auditioning.

Gary (to Bronson): "More coffee, Stevie-ji?"

Stevie Wonder (laughing): "Man, this brew's got soul, but it ain't got rhythm!"

Subtitle (Jonas Mekas, voiceover): i film this. the american dream, the immigrant's hustle, the actor's hunger, the poet's lament. all of it, a diary entry.

JD Salinger (muttering, cryptic): "The rye is in the coffee, the coffee is in the rye."

Subtitle (anti-humor): salinger's koan is met with silence. mama africa serves jollof rice. it is spicy. it is a metaphor. or maybe just rice.

The Unknown Comic (deadpan): "Why'd the coffee cross the road? It didn't, it's instant."

Subtitle (philosophical): the joke is a koan. the koan is a joke. the coffee is a metaphor. or maybe just coffee.

Jonas Mekas (playing his concertina): (The music is dissonant, mournful, a collision of Lithuanian folk and jazz. The camera pans to the Koffee King, its chrome reflecting the chaos.)

Subtitle (final line, typed slowly): i film this. the world is a diary. the diary is a film. the film is a metaphor. or maybe just life.

Credits (typed in Mekas' style): directed by jonas mekas starring charles bronson, gary felman, and the koffee king 2000 music by stevie wonder and a peacock special thanks to lithuania, coffee, and the unknown comic  
Subtitle (anti-humor, final line): the end. or maybe just the beginning. or maybe just coffee.

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